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DIFFERENCES IN SELF-PRESENTATION AND SELF-ESTEEM BETWEEN POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PERFECTIONISTS

Research focusing on relationship between perfectionism and self-esteem is rather new and offers various and sometimes contradictory findings. Furthermore, a relationship between perfectionism and implicit self-esteem is still an under- investigated topic. The aim of this study was to explore differences in levels of implicit and explicit self-esteem and self-presentation between positive and negative perfectionists. One hundred and forty undergraduate psychology participants in two time points filled in the Self-Liking and Self- Competence Scale, the Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale, the Perfectionism Questionnaire, and the Implicit Associations Test. Results showed a significant difference in self-liking, nondisplay of imperfection, and nondisclosure of imperfection between positive and negative perfectionists. Positive perfectionists scored significantly higher on self-liking, and lower on nondisplay and nondisclosure of imperfection than negative perfectionists did. Positive perfectionists also had significantly higher levels of implicit self-esteem. There was no significant difference in self-competence and perfectionistic self-promotion between positive and negative perfectionists.

Keywords: positive and negative perfectionism, perfectionistic self-presentation, explicit and implicit self-esteem

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Research focusing on relationship between perfectionism and self-esteem is rather new and offers various and sometimes contradictory findings. The results often vary depending on operationalisation of psychological constructs and measures that have been used.

Studies on self-esteem emphasize several issues concerning operationalisation of self-esteem and some methodological shortcomings of the measures that are typically used. Recently, the scientists have turned to multidimensional conceptualisation of self-esteem. Tafarodi and Swann (1995) argue that self-esteem consists of two different dimensions: one refers to the feeling of self-worth (self-liking), and the other refers to the feeling of personal efficacy (self-competence). Furthermore, research shows that distribution of self-esteem in general population is negatively asymmetrical, probably due to the effect of social desirability when completing the scales (Jelić, 2012). In order to avoid this problem, researchers turn to implicit measures of self-esteem, which are more apt to capture unfiltered aspects of self-esteem, because they deprive participants of consciously altering their responses (Buhrmester, Blanton, & Swann, 2011). Probably the most popular implicit measure is the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which has been developed by Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998), and which is based on the assumption that implicit self-esteem is a valenced association that a person has toward himself or herself (Buhrmester et al., 2011). However, the results obtained by explicit and implicit measures of self-esteem rarely correlate, because explicit self-esteem is a reflection of conscious and deliberate evaluation of self, whereas implicit self-esteem is a reflection of non-conscious and non-deliberate evaluation of self (Jelić, 2008). Studies that used both explicit and implicit measures of self-esteem have shown that the implicit self-esteem predicts some psychological processes and behaviours over and beyond the effect of explicit self-esteem (Jelić, 2008).

Most contemporary authors agree that there are two general forms of perfectionism: positive (adaptive) and negative (maladaptive) perfectionism, operationalised in two ways (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). The first is dimensional approach according to which various facets of perfectionism are distributed in two dimensions. Positive perfectionistic strivings refer to positive aspects of perfectionism, and they are correlated with positive outcomes. Perfectionistic concerns refer to negative aspect of perfectionism, and they are related to negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, negative affect and stress (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Hill, Hall, and Appleton (2011) have also revealed strong negative zero-order associations between perfectionistic concerns and indicators of psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and positive mood. The second approach, used in this study, is a group-based approach. According to this approach, combinations of facets differentiate between two groups of perfectionists (adaptive and maladaptive) and non-perfectionists (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Adaptive perfectionists strive to achieve high, but realistic and attainable goals, enjoy success, experiencing satisfaction and happiness when they achieve their goal, approach every task with

ease, trying to complete it correctly, on time and attentively, accept their mistakes and adjust their standards of success to specific situations and their abilities. Maladaptive perfectionists strive to accomplish unrealistically high goals, basing the assessment of their personal value on accomplishments. They are too self-critical, tense and anxious while performing a task, focusing on avoiding mistakes, which often results in procrastination or abandoning activity (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Both groups of perfectionists differ from non-perfectionists in higher results on the dimension of positive perfectionistic strivings, whereas adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists differ on the dimension of negative perfectionistic concern, which is more pronounced among maladaptive perfectionists (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

Hewitt and associates (2003) argue that it is also possible to differentiate between the two groups of perfectionists by the importance they attach to presenting themselves as perfect to others, and hiding their imperfections from other people. Perfectionistic self-presentation has two basic motivational components that refer to striving to either present self as perfect, or to avoid showing any sign of imperfection. It consists of three facets: Perfectionistic self-promotion, Nondisplay of imperfection, and Nondisclosure of imperfection. Perfectionistic self-promotion refers to actively showing and declaring one's "perfection". Nondisplay of imperfection refers to avoidant behaviour style in order to avoid showing or demonstrating overtly any imperfection. Nondisclosure of imperfection is the third facet that refers to avoiding verbal displays of any imperfections and evasiveness in interpersonal interactions. This measure for adults has been validated in numerous contexts (Flett, Coulter, & Hewitt, 2012).

Gotwals, Dunn, and Wayment (2003) state that results of the research often show that there is a connection only between self-esteem and negative perfectionism, whereas positive perfectionism only rarely shows correlation with self-esteem, and even in that case , it is low. Koivula, Hassmen, and Fallby (2002) argue that relation between self-esteem and perfectionism is complex, and that many psychological factors mediate this relationship. Their study has shown that individuals with high self-esteem are more prone to express positive perfectionism pattern, while those with lower self-esteem tend to express more maladaptive perfectionism pattern. Dunkley, Berg, and Zuroff (2012) have shown that negative perfectionists experience both lower levels of daily self-esteem and higher levels of attachment fears, and more instability in daily self-esteem, attachment fears, and affect. Additionally, the research has shown that negative aspects of perfectionism are related to higher levels of anxiety and lower level of self-confidence. The assumption is that positive perfectionists would have higher self-esteem due to their higher assessment of self-competence, higher satisfaction with their own accomplishments, and greater self-acceptance regardless of their success and failure. Negative perfectionists would have significantly lower self-esteem, due to their perception of low self-competence, dissatisfaction with achievement and

high self-criticism when faced with failure but also with success. (Zeigler-Hill & Terry, 2007).

Research has shown that perfectionistic self-presentation is related to low self-esteem. Facets of Perfectionistic Self-Presentation are related to a disturbed sense of self-worth, which corroborates interpersonal models that point to the fact that concerns regarding self-esteem are important components of maladaptive self-presentation (Hewitt et al., 2003). Only the facet Perfectionistic Self-Promotion implicates possible connection to higher levels of self-esteem. However, these results proved to be unstable, and they are considered to be a reflection of narcissistic tendencies, as opposed to adaptive moderate levels of self-esteem (Hewitt et al., 2003). It can be assumed that concerns related to self-esteem are also relevant for perfectionistic self-presentation, because a tendency of a person to present oneself as perfect represents a possibility to enhance self-esteem (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), or a possibility to gain esteem and acceptance from others (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). The results obtained by Mackinnon and Sherry (2012) are consistent with the theory and the research suggesting that both perfectionistic concerns and perfectionist ic self-presentation confer vulnerability to psychopathology and decreased well-being.

The relationship between perfectionism and implicit self-esteem is still an under-investigated topic. When exploring implicit self-.esteem and perfectionism, Zeiger-Hill and Terry (2007) investigated outcomes and consequences of discrepant levels of implicit and explicit self-esteem. Their results showed that the combination of low explicit and high implicit self-esteem is related to higher levels of both positive and negative perfectionism.

Lauri Korajlija (2010) has called for a different definition of perfectionism in her research, placing focus on what's beneath the desire for achieving success and/or avoiding failure. According to her findings, we can differentiate between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism in the context of self-concept, self-efficacy and self-competence as well. In line with that, adaptive perfectionism is probably characteristic of people who perceive themselves as capable and who have positive self-image. Maladaptive perfectionism is characteristic of people who have low self-esteem and who look down on themselves as incapable and less worthy. The perfectionistic strivings serve as a defence mechanism, i.e. as a way of preserving self-image. In other words, different levels of explicit and implicit self-esteem might be underlining adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. If the perfectionistic strivings really serve as the defence mechanism among maladaptive perfectionists, they might be based on lower level of implicit self-esteem. We believe that it is of a great importance to investigate this assumption, as such findings might bring attention of the researchers to the processes underlying perfectionism, and to deeper understanding of these phenomena.

Thus, the main goal of this study was to investigate differences in explicit and implicit self-esteem, and dimensions of perfectionistic self-presentation between positive and negative perfectionists. We expected negative perfectionists to have

lower levels of implicit self-esteem than positive perfectionists, and no differences in the levels of explicit self-esteem. Furthermore, we expected positive perfectionists to have lower levels of all three facets of perfectionistic self-presentation than negative perfectionists.

Method

Participants

One hundred and forty psychology undergraduate students (85% female) from Zagreb participated in this study. In this study we only used data of participants whose results were not discarded as outliers (*N* = 137).

Instruments

Self-Liking Self-Competence Scale (SLCS-R: Tafarodi & Swann, 2001). The SLCS-R consists of 16 items on which participants rate their agreement with the statements on 5-point Likert scales, where 8 items are related to self-liking, and 8 items are related to self-competence. The results are formed as a linear combination for each subscale independently. The alpha values are .87 for self-liking subscale and .80 for self-competence subscale.

Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (PSPS: Hewitt et al., 2003). PSPS is the 27-item measure of individual's need to publicly display own perfection, which consists of three subscales: perfectionistic self-promotion (10 items), nondisplay of imperfection (10 items), and nondisclosure of imperfection (7 items). The participants rate their agreement with the statements on the 7-point Likert scales. The results are formed as a linear combination for each subscale independently. The alpha values are .87 for perfectionistic self-promotion subscale; .88 for nondisplay of imperfection subscale and .73 for nondisclosure of imperfection subscale.

Perfectionism Questionnaire (PQ: Rhéaume, Freeston, & Bouchard, 1995). The PQ is a 34-item measure assessing trait dimensions of perfectionistic strivings (10 items) and perfectionistic concerns (24 items). Participants rate their agreement with the statements on the 5-point Likert scales. The general result on the scale represents a linear combination. The alpha values are .79 for perfectionistic strivings subscale and .95 for perfectionistic concerns subscale.

Implicit Associations Test (IAT: Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). The IAT measures self-esteem by assessing automatic associations of self with positive or negative valence. Specifically, it measures the extent to which people pair "self" more quickly with pleasant words than with unpleasant words. The test has been performed according to the algorithm of Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003), which has already been validated in Croatia (Jelić & Tonković, 2009).

The result on IAT is the difference in the average reaction time between the re-versed sorting task and the simple sorting task, and that difference in reaction time is interpreted as a measure of implicit self-esteem.

Results

We followed the group-based approach in order to investigate perfectionism, hence we divided participants into groups of positive and negative perfectionists, and separated them from non-perfectionists. We separated perfectionists from non-perfectionists according to their results on the dimension of perfectionistic strivings. – Perfectionists were students with results above median on that subscale ($C = 36$). Based on their results on the perfectionistic concern subscale ($C = 71$), we divided perfectionists into two groups: positive perfectionists (high on perfectionistic striv-ings and low on perfectionistic concerns) and negative perfectionists (high both on perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns). Since non-perfectionists were not the focus of this research they were discarded from further analyses.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations of the PSPS Subscales, IAT, SLSC subscales and t-test value for the positive and negative perfectionists

	Positive perfectionists ($n = 19$)		Negative perfectionists ($n = 41$)		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*(58)
PSPS – Perfectionistic self-promotion	39.0	9.03	41.9	10.57	-1.03
PSPS – Nondisplay of imperfection	19.3	4.99	23.6	5.47	-2.92**
PSPS – Nondisclosure of imperfection	38.8	10.45	46.5	8.75	-2.97**
IAT – Reaction time difference	278.7	149.38	220.3	94.05	1.57
SLSC – Self-liking	29.4	5.87	25.5	5.49	2.51**
SLSC – Self-competence	27.6	4.46	26.5	4.61	0.87

** $p < .01$.

Before performing the analyses, we checked normality of distributions by us-ing Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The assumption of normality was confirmed for all variables. The results in Table 1 showed that positive perfectionists scored signifi-cantly higher on self-liking (Cohen's $d = .67$) and significantly lower on nondisplay

of imperfection (Cohen's *d* = .82), as well as nondisclosure of imperfection, than negative perfectionists (Cohen's *d* = .80). Also, the results showed a clear trend, although insignificant in this sample, that positive perfectionists had higher level of implicit self-esteem than negative perfectionists. No difference between positive and negative perfectionists was found in the average level of perfectionistic self-promotion and self-competence.

Discussion

Negative perfectionists express stronger urge to avoid admitting their mistakes or showing imperfections in front of the other people. These results corroborate findings of Hewitt and associates (2003) according to which these two dimensions of perfectionistic self-presentation represent an avoidant behaviour style similar to the characteristics of negative perfectionism. No difference between positive and negative perfectionists has been found in perfectionistic self-promotion dimension. These results are similar to findings of Hewitt and associates (2003) that suggest complexity and inconsistency of the dimension of perfectionistic self-promotion, which lead the authors to the conclusion that perfectionistic self-promotion might also reflect some positive behaviour, as well and that higher levels of perfectionistic self-promotion are not characteristic of negative perfectionists only. Higher self-liking among positive perfectionists suggests more pronounced feeling of self-worth in positive than in negative perfectionists, which is in line with findings from other studies about perfectionistic dimensions (Greblo, 2012). We have hypothesized that the perfectionistic strivings in negative perfectionists might represent a defence mechanism that would be manifested in lower levels of implicit self-esteem among them (Lauri Korajlija, 2010). Although our hypothesis has not been confirmed due to our small and convenient sample, the data show a clear trend in the expected direction. Negative perfectionists basically have lower self-esteem, and perfectionistic strivings help them to maintain their self-image. Different levels of explicit and implicit self-esteem among positive and negative perfectionists confirm the assumption that the positive perfectionists are people with high self-esteem on both explicit and implicit level, while negative perfectionism is typical for people of lower self-esteem, who regard themselves as less worthy (Lauri Korajlija, 2010).

Limitations of this study refer to the small sample of predominantly female participants. The participants are psychology students and therefore our results cannot be generalized. Future research should focus on replicating these results and investigating the relationship between explicit and implicit self-esteem, and positive and negative perfectionism on larger and more representative samples.

The relationship between implicit self-esteem and perfectionism is still under investigated area in psychology research, and to our knowledge, this study is the first to tap in that direction. Despite certain limitations, this study makes an

important step towards deeper understanding of the nature of perfectionism and its relation to different forms of self-esteem. Our results represent valuable base for future research in this area.

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RAZLIKE U SAMOPREZENTACIJI I SAMOPOŠTOVANJU IZMEĐU POZITIVNIH I NEGATIVNIH PERFEKCIONISTA

Dosadašnja istraživanja jasno pokazuju različitu povezanost eksplicitnog samopoštovanja s dimenzijama pozitivnog i negativnog perfekcionizma. Perfekcionističke brige jasno su negativno povezane sa nižim nivoom samopoštovanja, dok je povezanost perfekcionističkih težnji i samopoštovanja neznačajna ili tek blago pozitivna. S druge strane, do sada nisu rađena istraživanja koja bi se bavila ispitivanjem povezanosti implicitnog samopoštovanja s perfekcionizmom i njegovim dimenzijama. Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je proveriti razlikuju li se nivoi samopoštovanja, merenog eksplicitnim i implicitnim merama, te perfekcionističke samoprezentacije kod pozitivnih i negativnih perfekcionista. Istraživanje je sprovedeno u dve vremenske tačke na uzorku od 140 studenata. U prvoj tački merenja studenti su ispunjavali Skalu samosviđanja i samokompetentnosti, te Skalu perfekcionističke samoprezentacije, a u drugoj Upitnik perfekcionizma i Test implicitnih asocijacija. Pozitivni perfekcionisti su studenti koji imaju izražene perfekcionističke težnje, ali ne i perfekcionističke brige, dok su negativni perfekcionisti studenti kod kojih su obe dimenzije perfekcionizma visoko izražene. Utvrđeno je kako pozitivni perfekcionisti imaju značajno viši nivo samosviđanja, te značajno niže nivoe dimenzija prikrivanja nesavršenosti i nepokazivanja nesavršenosti od negativnih perfekcionista. Takođe, pozitivni perfekcionisti imaju i značajno viši nivo implicitnog samopoštovanja od negativnih perfekcionista. Nisu dobijene značajne razlike između pozitivnih i negativnih perfekcionista u samokompetentnosti i dimenziji perfekcionističke samopromocije. Dobijeni niski nivoi eksplicitnog i implicitnog samopoštovanja kod negativnih perfekcionista u skladu su s tezom o tome da je negativan perfekcionizam karakteristika osoba koje imaju nisko samopoštovanje i misle o sebi kao manje vrednima. Ovaj nalaz ima značajne teorijske i praktične implikacije.

Ključne reči: pozitivni i negativni perfekcionizam, perfekcionistička samoprezentacija, eksplicitno i implicitno samopoštovanje